



Report  
March 2020

# Political Crisis in Haiti



Political Analysis

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Haiti is mired in a political-institutional crisis, set against a background of chronic and severe economic and social problems. Since March 2019, a stand-off between President Jovenel Moïse's minority government and the opposition-led Assembly has escalated to the point of the legislature being effectively suspended.

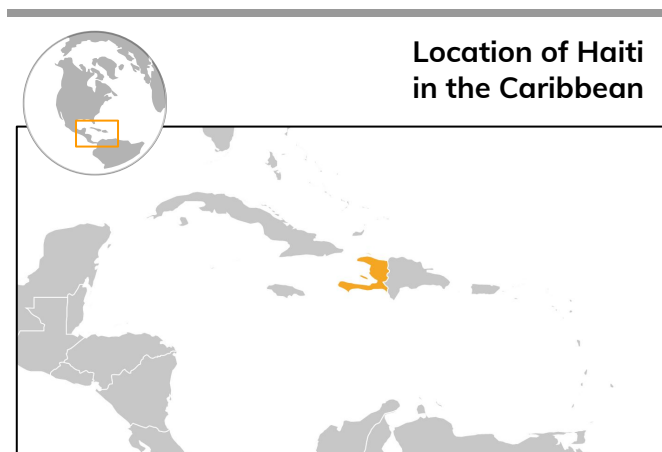
This report explains how the latest crisis unfolded. It starts with a brief institutional, political and economic description of the country, followed by an overview of the dispute and of the two protagonists at its center.

We end with predicting how the situation may develop in the coming weeks. This is especially in light of the surprising and only just announced decision by the new Prime Minister, Joute Joseph, to include opposition members in his new cabinet.



# Haiti

the poorest country in Latin America



Location of Haiti  
in the Caribbean

## General information

Haiti is one of the thirteen countries of the Caribbean Islands. It is a semi-presidentialist republic, which means its Executive branch is divided in two: a President, who serves as the Head of State, and a Prime Minister, as Head of Government. According to the Constitution, the President represents the nation and, with agreement of the Assembly, appoints the Prime Minister who then selects the Cabinet and presides over Government.



Jovonel Moïse,  
Haitian President



Joseph Jouthe, Haitian  
Prime Minister

Haiti's is a bicameral Legislative branch. This consists of a Chamber of Deputies (199 seats) and a Senate (30 seats). As well as approving laws, it is also tasked with ratifying the Prime Minister proposed by the President.

Haiti is the most impoverished country in Latin America, the majority of its citizens living in poverty. It is held back by abject infrastructure, periodically decimated by natural disasters. Public discontent is widespread and can be seen in frequent protests and civil unrest.



## Fight for power, institutional deadlock

Haiti's social discontent, on top of institutional shortcomings such as its high number of political parties - which complicates the creation of legislative majorities and so the approval of new laws - and its system of government - which spreads power almost equally between the Legislature and Executive - are key to explaining the country's recurring political crises.

The most recent began in March 2019. It can be directly traced to the weaknesses of Haiti's semi-presidentialist political system, which by hampering the formation of a ruling party majority in the Assembly makes electing a Prime Minister able to govern effectively extremely difficult. From an institutional perspective, this is how last year's confrontation between the Government and Assembly kicked off.

The crisis boiled over on March 18, 2019, when the Assembly dismissed the Prime Minister, Jean Henry Céant, in part over his poor handling of the economy. The President Jovenel Moïse appointed Jean-Michelle Lapin as his replacement, but this was rejected by the Parliament.

A company owned by Moïse was then embroiled in a corruption scandal, known as "Petrocaribe". The opposition alleged the President had siphoned off funds for personal gain earmarked to buy cheap Venezuelan oil.

The scandal cranked up the country's economic and social woes and came amid, and helped prompt, a spike in inflation and food shortages, sparking further social unrest and anti-government protests.

In response, Moïse moved to replace Lapin with Fritz-William Michel, in a bid to break the deadlock. Once again, Parliament refused to ratify and instead called for the President's resignation. This hardened the standoff between the two branches and led the President to indefinitely postpone convening legislative elections, originally set for October 2019. In fact the elections were never called, and so as of January 13, 2020, when the terms of the entire Chamber of Deputies and two thirds of the Senate expired, the Assembly has been suspended de facto.

Opposition protests grew even stronger that month and in February as a result, which ultimately forced the President to agree to talks with the opposition, which Government representatives said were to "negotiate the formation of a government of national unity". The main interlocutors were the Movement for the Freedom and Equality of Haitians and the Democratic Bloc. Both demanded the appointment of an opposition Prime Minister as a sign of Moïse's willingness to compromise.





However, amid accusations of “intransigence” from opposition MPs during the talks, Moïse appointed a new Prime Minister, Joute Joseph, on March 2. This was unacceptable to the opposition,

with Joseph being a known government figure and loyal to the President. Once again the opposition called for the rejection of Moïse's appointment and of his other political initiatives.

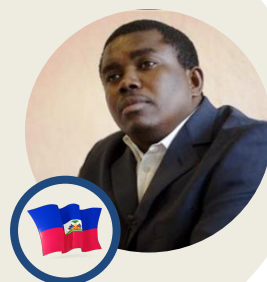
## Moïse and Michel: the ruling party and opposition leaders at the heart of the dispute

Moïse and the head of the opposition, André Michel, have been the two key players in this dispute. A quick background on each is provided below:



**Jovenel Moïse - President. He represents the Tek Kale Party (PHTK).** He is regarded as an outsider who, coming from the business world, had no prior political experience. He was elected in November 2016 with 55.67% of the vote and was supported by PHTK's founder and former president, Michel Martelly. Moïse is also backed by the family of the former Haitian dictator, Jean-Claude Duvalier.

**André Michel - He is the leader of the Consensual Alternative Party for the Refoundation of Haiti.** Also he is the spokesman for the opposition social movement, Democratic Sector. He is a lawyer specializing in human rights and anti-corruption. He has said the objective of his movement is "to reach a successful transitional political agreement" to remove Moïse from power. Other goals are to create a new Constitution that restricts the powers of the President, and call for new legislative elections. These objectives are shared with other opposition blocs such as Passarelle, Patriotic Forum, Mache Kontre, and the Democratic Bloc.





## Next Steps

With the appointment of Joseph as Prime Minister, the conflict in Haiti entered a new phase. Emmanuel Ménard (Force Louverturienne-opposition) was among those calling for a halt to the Government talks on the grounds that, in his words, President Moïse had chosen a "path of confrontation".

Moïse, notwithstanding, is expected to move forward with his political agenda, which includes a plan to reform the Constitution, enabling the President to appoint the Prime Minister without consent from the Assembly.

On March 4, at the time of writing this report, Prime Minister Joute Joseph announced his new cabinet members. Among them the following figures stand out:

- Minister of Economy and Finance: Michel Patrick Boisvert
- Minister of Trade and Industry: Jonas Coffy
- Minister of Transport and Public Works Communication: Joaséus Nader
- Minister of Public Health and Population: Marie Greta Roy Clément
- Minister of Social Affairs and Labour: Nicole Yolette Altidor
- Minister of Justice and Public Security: Lucmane Delile.

It is noteworthy that Joseph thus becomes the first Premier since Céant, Moïse's first-appointed Prime Minister, to reshuffle the Cabinet. What is more, he has appointed opposition members to it, such as Coffy from the political organization Ayisyen for Ayiti and Delile from the political party Òganizasyon Pèp Kap Lité.

In the absence of a functioning legislature, Joseph will have to govern without ratification. Time will tell if he can deliver on the President's wish to make his government "open and capable of responding to the country's emergencies".



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